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THE SPHERE OF HOME INFLUENCE IN SCHOOL LIFE.*

BY THE REV. W. C. COMPTON, M.A.

(Head Master of Dover College.)

BEFORE approaching the subject matter of this paper, I wish to clear away any possible misconceptions that may have arisen through the form the title has taken. It is not proposed to deal with so large a subject as Early Home Training, as preparatory to the work of the School, but rather to consider how, during school days, Home Influences can best co-operate with those of the School—both acting simultaneously—in the development of character, which we all regard as the highest end of education; as we have been recently reminded by, perhaps, the greatest living authority on education, the present Archbishop of Canterbury, in his address at Rugby, at the unveiling of the bust of Dr. Arnold. One may, perhaps, be pardoned, even in addressing the P.N.E.U., for expanding the reference, when so great an authority has spoken. Alluding to the debt we all owe to Dr. Arnold, the Archbishop said that it was he who first proclaimed, not by word only, but also by personal example, what was the true purpose of all real education. On every occasion throughout his life, Dr. Arnold was perpetually illustrating the truth that, in Education, *character must always stand above everything else*. Before his time the classics had been capably taught, and schools tolerably governed, but it had not been seen how, in Education, the *training of character is of infinite importance, and all else, however excellent, stands at a far lower level*. It was in this mutual confidence between teacher and pupil that the former found the means to reach the noblest aim he could have before him, and the latter the noblest development of his whole being.

*A Paper read before the Parents' National Educational Union, Folkestone, February 23rd, 1897.

It is with this ideal of Education that the present paper is concerned, and in particular with the question—how Home and School may best be correlated or co-ordinated for the true purposes of such an ideal.

Since the bulk of this paper was written, I have again glanced over the pages of Mr. Lyttelton's "Mothers and Sons," which had lain undisturbed on the shelf, while I tried to produce what should be rather the result of my own experience than a résumé of other people's, but it has made me conscious of the futility of my attempt to write on a subject so fully and ably treated in those pages. As, however, my ships are burnt, I must needs go on with what I have taken in hand, and trust that there may be in so far less suspicion of vain repetition, as the ground to be covered is, by my definition, limited to a small part of the area embraced under the larger heading of "Mothers and Sons."

I observe that, in defining the aims of true Education, Mr. Lyttelton speaks of "Goodness" as "the end aimed at, while the intellect and physical powers come in for their share of attention." So far so good. But I think he hardly does himself justice in adding—"the former because character can certainly be moulded through it, the latter because we have no right to ill-treat our own bodies." Without differing in reality, I am sure, I shall venture in the consideration of "The Sphere of Home Influence in School Life," to place physical training on a higher platform than the merely negative one of avoiding ill-treatment. No one can be a better judge than Mr. Lyttelton of the value of a well-trained physique as an equipment for a noble life of usefulness. Man is given a physical frame in which to live and work in this physical world; and to have that frame developed to its very best capacity, as a necessary, though subsidiary, part of the training towards "the perfect man—the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ," is, I am sure, a not unimportant branch of true Education. Members of the P.N.E.U. need not be reminded of the able articles in the *Parents' Review*, by Dr. Strachan and Dr. Lewis, dealing with this subject. And I will here only postulate that we are considering how the Home can co-operate with the School during school days in the development of character, including the physical, intellectual, moral, and spiritual needs of the

child, so that he may grow up fit for the work he shall be called to do in this world, and fit to do it in the best possible way by having the most made of the potentialities of his whole being.

It will be felt at once that such a subject will need some differences of treatment in regard to the case of boys and of girls, and again, in regard to day schools and boarding schools. Upon the former head I shall speak with much diffidence, as having little or no right to advance any views of my own with regard to the training of girls. But I may, perhaps, be allowed to say that what I shall endeavour to put forward in regard to the Sphere of Home Influence in general may be accepted as having just so much bearing on the education of both sexes as is consistent with the acceptability or the reverse of one main proposition—that, as the life of a woman is, in a higher degree than that of a man, a domestic life, so the Sphere of Home Influence must, in her case, be proportionately greater. Some will go so far as to say it should be extended to the exclusion of all thought of school; others will reduce it to very nearly the same limits as those which will be approved in the case of boys. Between these extremes there is room for much variety, and I do not feel that my subject imposes upon me the necessity of offering any indication of my own opinion, even if it were of any value.

I would rather refer to the pages of "Sesame and Lilies," in which the lecture on "Queen's Gardens" has always been to me a poem of the noblest order upon womanhood, though the change that has come over Education since it was published, has made some of the strictures (§80) to be out of date. I need not make quotations from what must be household words to all who take an interest in Education, the whole of it will be read and re-read, and the rhapsody with which it concludes, I would have every girl to learn by heart, not only as one of the gems of English literature, but for the sake of its poetical thought and its noble ideal. Who can read unmoved: "Far among the moorlands and the rocks, far in the darkness of the terrible streets, these feeble florets are lying with all their fresh leaves torn and their stems broken. Will you never go down to them, nor set them in order in their little fragrant beds, nor fence them in their

trembling from the fierce wind? Shall morning follow morning, for you, but not for them; and the dawn rise to watch, far away, those frantic Dances of Death; but no dawn rise to breathe upon these living banks of wild violet and woodbine and rose, nor call to you through your casement, saying:—

Come into the garden, Maud,
For the black bat, Night, has flown,
And the woodbine spices are wafted abroad,
And the hush of the roses blown?"

Pardon me; I have allowed myself to be carried away from speaking of the difference in the Sphere of Home Influence according to sex; from which we pass to a more easy classification, according to whether we are dealing with boarding or day schools, *i.e.*, whether Home Influence is exercised by daily personal contact and intercourse out of school hours, and by the manifold environment of those who live at home all the year round, or whether these influences are brought to bear for a number of years—when character formation is most rapidly progressing, and when one might almost say character is becoming crystallized—only through personal contact in the holidays, and by correspondence during the greater part of the year.

It hardly concerns our subject to discuss the relative merits of these systems. But I may perhaps be permitted to enlarge a little here, inasmuch as the Sphere of Home Influence would be very considerably affected, if either system were to become more largely in the ascendant as compared with the other than is now the case, *i.e.*, the aggregate result of Home Influence on society as a whole would be greater or less, according as home or school boarding were to become the general rule.

I am well aware that owing to the absence of any Dr. Arnold before the middle of this century, there was much in the public school life of England that was wrong—much ignorance, much want of sympathy, much mistrust, and much mismanagement. This will hardly be disputed by the most Spartan champion of public school life as it was then. The result was only natural, that those who shrank from exposing their sons to such risks, would prefer to extend the Sphere of Home Influence by keeping them at home under tutors, or

sending them to the home influence of some clergyman's family. Whether the results were satisfactory would be a matter of considerable doubt: for the boy of sterling character would weather the storms of public school life, and help to form the material out of which all of England's heroes have been made, whilst the weaker character who might have succumbed to the environment of school life, as it then was, in very many cases probably fell into temptations of other kinds—some of them perhaps as deadly—whilst he lost the bracing effect of having to rough it, and to pass through the crucible of a possibly severer ordeal.

But we are not living in those times; and though I am not going to put myself out of court by affecting to believe that our great schools, or our boarding schools, or for that matter our day schools are immaculate, I have no hesitation in saying there is now in the length and breadth of England in private and public schools, in boarding schools of all sorts, and I have no doubt also in day schools—though there the opportunities are far less, and the attention paid to character is proportionate to the opportunities for dealing with it in all our schools—I say, there is to-day an amount of thought and care bestowed upon the great problem of true Education, as defined in the words I have quoted from the Archbishop—a sense in short of the attention due to the old saying now so familiar: "*Maxima debetur pueris reverentia*"—which was wholly unknown to a former generation, or, if not wholly unknown, then at least known only as the voice of one crying in the wilderness. Hence, I would ask your indulgence if I am trespassing beyond the legitimate sphere of this paper, when I say that the idea that vice is inseparable from boarding schools is altogether out of date, and on the contrary, if a wise choice is made, a boy is far more likely to be in good hands at the preparatory boarding school and at the public boarding school, than as a home boarder, when he *will* mix with others, come what may, and he will be without the experienced counsel and the protection from mischief which is afforded by those who have made character and its needs and its dangers their special study; whilst parents, however fond, are often totally unable to guide because they imagine their darling boy, who, with his school-fellows, has the run of the streets of a town at all hours of the

day, is as innocent at 15 as he was at 5, because he has his *meals* at home and *sleeps* at home. I have it from some of the best of preparatory school-masters, confirmed by my own experience, that whatever of trouble they have experienced from evil-minded boys has been traced to mischief at a time when the parent has guaranteed the boy to be as innocent as a babe. I could give the name at this moment of a case in point. It is *before* your child goes to a school as a boarder away from his home, that the mischief has been done, and almost under your eyes.

I had purposed to say no more on this head. But, though it belongs more especially to the period of early training, yet it is a matter of such vital importance from the parents' point of view, and one on which parents in general are so very much in need of helpful counsel from those who see the other side to their own, that I feel constrained to add a few words, if it be only to urge this duty of taking *nothing* for granted; a little openness at home—ever so little, it may be, by way of showing the boy that he cannot be learning anything which is outside the sphere of his parents' knowledge—ever so little by way of warning that he should have no secrets, that anything he may have heard others speak of, and about which his curiosity may be roused, should be brought home and laid bare before one or other parent, in the assurance that there will be nothing but sympathy and kindness for him to expect, and that he will have his doubts put right in the best way. This will be infinitely better than to risk the consequences of leaving him to nurse his curiosity till he has found what is the worst possible means of relieving it; for find it he will. This is a matter which deeply concerns the Sphere of Home Influence. No parent would wish to leave a child without guidance at the critical time; but few, as far as my experience goes, know the time; fewer still have the courage, or the gift, to use it. Thus, for want of this Home Influence, at least nine boys out of ten are left to the devices of school-fellows, who are more ignorant than wicked, because they have themselves suffered from the same sad neglect, but who, in their ignorant wickedness, present the fruit of the Tree of their Knowledge of Good and Evil, with the same recommendation as was used when it was first put upon the market, that it is "pleasant to the eyes,

and a tree to be desired to make one wise." Let the P.N.E.U. plead with parents throughout the length and breadth of the land for "light, more light." Open your own eyes to the facts that are eternally true, and let in the light upon what is kept hidden from you in the lives of your children.

And what, it may be asked, is the right time for speaking? The *best* time is no time at all. For a child, whose life and every thought has been open, will never need the sudden awakening. If we did not keep our cupboards locked there would never be a time when the child would discover that there was some fruit concealed within, which is pleasant to the eyes, and to be desired. But, when that is not the case, the time for unlocking the cupboard may be before school days come; it may be at the time of going to school; it may be at an *early* date after going to school. But it is too late to put it off longer. The conditions will have changed, and may have changed greatly for the worse because the golden opportunity has been lost.

Is this a condemnation of school? Does it amount to saying schools are necessarily full of evil influences, and to send a boy there is to send him as a lamb among wolves? If it were so there would be the highest authority for doing so, provided some of the wisdom of the serpent has not been overlooked as the right accompaniment to the harmlessness of the dove.

But the fault is not so much in the social life of the school, which may reflect, as in a microcosm, the various forms of social life to be found in the world; but it lies in our own conduct when we hold in our own hands weapons—edged tools, no doubt—weapons which we deny our children when we send them to battle, lest they should wound themselves instead of using them for their protection. Believe me, the evil will come directly from the Tempter invisible, when there is no human agent for him to employ. A brazen tower could not avail to keep Danae safe, and a hermit's cell never succeeded in excluding the presence of temptation.

But, all important as it is, I must not pursue this part of the subject further. I have endeavoured to show that you may in most, or at least very many, cases rely on the School taking a sound view and doing all it can. The power of Home Influence is here much greater, when it is rightly

exercised. But, in the case of the School, the knowledge is generally wider, and the responsibility it takes over when the child is sent away from home is duly recognised; it deserves your confidence.

A word more for such as cannot believe in a boarding school as a proper place to send their children to. You trust your Day school teacher to *teach*, because you believe him to be an expert, as you trust your doctor in matters of health. Would it not be consistent if, for the same reason, you were to trust, for training character, those who have made Education of character their special study? It is not necessary, after all that has been said already about the Sphere of Home Influence, to guard against the inference that the duties of the home may be discharged vicariously by trusting the educational expert, or that, "by mere money payments" (as has been well said in the *Parents' Review* for February) "parents can divest themselves of the responsibilities which come with the gift of children."

(To be continued.)